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7000 teens die as a result of automobile crashes every year in this country. That is twice the number of people who died as a result of the attacks on 9/11. Our country went to war over 9/11... What are we doing about teens dying in car crashes?

**One element that is already in place, yet needs improvement, is Driver Education.**

Driving is considered a privilege. However, in today's society, especially with all the talk of school to work transition, driving is an essential privilege. For this reason alone, driver training should be a part of basic education. Driving is a social task and new drivers must be given the skills to interact appropriately and safely within the Highway Transportation System. Lowering high risk behaviors and good habit development are what quality Traffic Safety Education programs are all about.

As ADTSEA Teacher of the Year, I have the privilege of speaking to you on behalf of Traffic Safety Educators across the United States. I have a unique perspective, having taught teens and trained teachers in two states, Washington and Montana. In Montana, although the crash last winter involving a teacher and his students is very disturbing, the Driver Education program is going strong. Dedicated teachers continue to offer quality instruction. The Washington State program has been a model for many states across the nation. Their curriculum, parent involvement materials, and supplemental materials have been used or duplicated in several other states. Teachers from Washington, myself included, have been presenters at conferences and workshops in various states and on a national level. In tough economic times, the Legislature in Washington is slowly dismantling the public school program in Washington State, in part because, the perception of what we do and the reality of what we do are so misunderstood.

Thus comes one of the challenges we face as Driver Education teachers that I would like to share with you. **The misperception of what it is the Driver Education is and should be.** Parents and teens want mobility. They want to find it cheap, convenient, and fast. The public perception of Driver Education is that our purpose is to prepare teens to pass the written and driving exam at the local licensing department and if they should get a few safety tips along the way, great. However, where public

school driver training programs exist, the majority of teens will get their training, because parents know and trust the teachers and the schools. A quality program attempts to do much more than simply prepare teens for the licensing test. Let me go into teacher mode and demonstrate:

For every session I conduct with teens, I hold a parent information night. This is one of the ways I work at changing the misconception of what I do. During this meeting I ask the parents these four questions:

- 1) What color is a yield sign?
- 2) What is the correct hand position on the steering wheel?
- 3) What is a reference point and how and why is it used?
- 4) If the ABS light comes on while driving what does it mean?

Parents will make the same mistakes you do.

- A. The state drivers guide will tell you about yield signs but there are still signs out there that are the wrong color. Students need to be prepared for these and know what to do.
- B. Some, but not all, state drivers guides will talk about hand position but the information is not consistent, nor always correct. They do not go into the reasons certain hand positions are recommended.
- C. There is no information on reference points in a state guide, yet it is a practical application that has tremendous effect if taught and used correctly.
- D. The information regarding ABS will be found in the owner's manual of an automobile, but parents more often than not will not know the answer nor will the salesman that sold the car. The answer is not consistent from make to make, model to model.

From these few examples, you can see that Driver Education is much more comprehensive than basic car control. You can also see that the adults that are practicing with teens need a little refresher themselves.

Another serious challenge Driver Education teachers face is that of **time**. We have a tremendous amount of material to cover in an incredibly short amount of time. In Montana, students are required to have 60 hours of structured learning to include six hours of Behind the Wheel, in traffic instruction. Simulation may be included as a part of that 60 hours. In Washington State, the minimum requirements are 30 hours of classroom instruction and 4 hours behind the wheel. However, until very recently, most public school programs provided considerably more than the minimum requirement. And in Washington State in 2001, before the implementation of GDL, the fatality rate for

the 16-20 age group, was 42.8% lower than the national average. We need to ask why this is true. Was it the cars in Washington? Laws? Enforcement? Roadways? Were any of those significantly different than elsewhere in the country...

Learning takes place when behavior is changed. How many gold medal ice skaters, world champion little league pitchers or NBA all-stars were created with only six hours of instruction and practice? Driving is a life long skill. Precision driving skills and good habit development are essential. We cannot effectively accomplish this in only six hours. That is the reason why research has shown that driver education does not work. Behavior is not changed over the long term. The main reason why we are seeing some success with the implementation of Graduated Licensing, is not because of the extra practice time teens are putting in with their parents, but because they are not allowed to participate in high risk behaviors until they have additional experience behind the wheel. This does not mean that the additional experience is developing good driving habits. 40,000 people die in car crashes each year. The number one cause of crashes is driver error. Those errors are often the result of poor driving habits. Perfect practice makes perfect skills. In our current way of doing things, the perfect practice needed is not taking place. These facts not only tell us that teens need more time to learn, but again, that adults need a periodic refresher as well. We spend millions of dollars educating children. What is the point if it is all squandered in a moment, when that child is killed in a car crash?

Another weakness in Driver Education is the **lack of consistent standards for content and delivery** of the program. Content and delivery may be different from state to state, school to school, teacher to teacher. Generally speaking, public school programs have much higher expectations for their students than do commercial (for profit) programs. Consequently, a national standard **MUST** be developed, implemented, and expected for ALL new drivers. To be truly effective, a comprehensive Traffic Safety Education program must be established in the K-12 school curriculum, of which, Driver Education is only a part. Automobile collisions are the Nations' most serious health problem, especially where teens are concerned. For this reason, this comprehensive curriculum must become a part of basic education.

And then, a challenge for teachers is **evaluation for the purpose of improving instruction**. In our current structure, there is a **lack of monitoring and therefore a lack of meaningful evaluation** of curriculum and instruction. Most new teachers, even I as a veteran in a new district, are assigned mentors to guide and assist them through their first year of teaching. This does not exist for TSE.

Administrators are required to evaluate teachers on an annual basis. This does not happen in Driver Education, justified by the idea that it is part time or extracurricular. Truth be known, the majority of administrators know little about this specialized field so are unable to effectively evaluate.

So now we come to the state staff who are the experts. In 1990, when Washington State had 244 districts offering Driver Education to approximately 48,000 students there were 7 state staff overseeing the program. They had time and resources to go to school districts, evaluate curriculum and instruction and help to implement improvements. Today there are still 200 districts offering programs and one state staff assigned half time, to oversee the statewide program. Montana is primarily a rural state with 147 districts and approximately 303 teachers serving Montana teens. David Huff is

also a one-man show. Public school driver education teachers are clamoring for professional development opportunities and meaningful evaluation of their programs and instruction. Lack of personnel and limited resources affect the ability of state staff, the experts, to provide these valuable tools to teachers.

We spend millions of dollars on education in this country. Millions of dollars are spent on research to determine what works in education. Driver educators already use and believe in many of those proven theories. Lets designate some of those research dollars to find what DOES work in terms of learning and therefore changing behavior specific to driving. We have a captive audience in the schools. A research project done at Washington State University showed that students attending public school driver education programs showed less participation in high risk behaviors, not just driving behaviors, but activities such as smoking and drugs as well. This is another indicator that education in our public schools is indeed valuable and effective. We must work together to maintain and improve our driver education programs.

There are many stakeholders, public health organizations, insurance companies, law enforcement agencies, judicial bodies, and highway administrations, who should have a vested interest in seeing the improvement NOT elimination of driver education in schools. Again, car crashes are a serious public health problem. The private interest is in mobility, the public interest must be safety.

As a teacher who has been recognized as one of the best, I'd like to leave you with this thought:

Good teachers seek out ways to increase their knowledge and improve their instruction. Good teachers do not fight regulations that will truly improve instruction. A good teacher needs to be paid what they are worth **BUT** a good teacher does **NOT** do what they do for the money. They do it because it is good for kids. Driver Education teachers are no different.